

Every Name in History: The Cosmopolitan Kindergarten

David Kilpatrick

What brings us together, the meaning, purpose or theme of this symposium, the justification for our assembly, the call for our gathering is perhaps paradoxical. “Nietzsche in History” as a session in a series on “Nietzsche Today” is caught in the tension between the poles of the past and present. Many questions are begged with such a call. Why Nietzsche now? Which Nietzsche now? How might Nietzsche be relevant at this time in relation to his past and/or our past/s? Nietzsche of course may be in peril of being confined to history, becoming an artifact in a history of ideas, listed among thinkers and catalogued, his thoughts classified and historicized. How should we proceed or, more to the point, how must we proceed – for if there is no urgency, no necessity, why bother – to answer this call or these calls?

Who should we blame for the preposition planted in the proposition, the provocation of our gathering? The *in* in our invitation summons to my mind the lines written by Nietzsche from Torino on 6 January 1889, three days after his collapse in the Piazza Carlo Alberto, to Jacob Burkhardt: “at root every name in history is I”¹ or, in another translation, “at bottom I am every name in history”.² Such an inn won’t provide rest for a weary traveler but uproots and dislocates, an invitation to an unhomely concern. How will we answer such a summons? And how do we think through this problem of one who ecstatically identifies with every name in history? Should such sentiment be dismissed as a symptom of psychological sickness? Can such a statement mean anything more than mere madness?

¹ SL, 90.

² PN, 686.

Our now, our historical present, the news this week, this month bring certain associations to mind. How are we to reconcile or come to terms with if not understand how a plane bound from Barcelona for Düsseldorf, Germanwings Flight 9525, is intentionally crashed into the French Alps by Andreas Lubitz, writing his name on the long list of madmen in history by killing himself and 149 people who trusted him to fly them to their destination safely. “He was passionate about the Alps – obsessed even” said Dieter Wagner, a co-member of the flying club in Montabaur with Lubitz.³ Without the reassurance of theological or ideological motivation, the staging of such a disaster leaves the world to ponder yet another German nihilist suicidal mass-murderer. We thought we had seen enough last century. But Nietzsche’s identification with such nihilism must be rejected, whether it be associated with Lubitz or Hitler. Nietzsche cannot say no to such association with nihilistic acts as disparate as Flight 9525 and the Shoah/השואה. But his readers are obliged to do so. This morning’s news also told of swastikas at SUNY-Purchase and tensions with Hasidics in Rockland. Given his erroneous associations with nihilism, anti-Semitism and National Socialism, we have yet to move beyond the world-historical crises with which many associate Nietzsche.

So when we talk about “Nietzsche in History,” we cannot simply erase that Nietzsche, the false, fraudulent or misunderstood Nietzsche. We must continue to come to terms with the misappropriation of Nietzsche while being sensitive to watchful of being guilty of such an error ourselves. Nietzsche surely has a troubled history or a problematic relationship to history, how his history is told. The syphilitic lunatic and the megalomaniacal ideologue of racial supremacy are both identifiers with which Nietzsche’s thoughts are still too often dismissed and we would

³ Silverstein. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/andreas-lubitz-obsessed-alps-friend-article-1.2165370>

be remiss if we did not acknowledge such misrepresentations. We must do so if we are to listen to his sacred YES and to hear how this untimely thinker speaks to our time.

There is, of course, no shortage in Nietzsche's corpus of prolonged meditations on history and the historical as well as his place in history. The first fifteen sections of *The Birth of Tragedy* an "elaborate historical example"⁴ before he relocates his ancient concern with what the mythopoetics of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* might mean for a modern Germany in his 1872 book-length debut. At the risk of cherry-picking (an inevitable hazard for any textual engagement with one who dared write such often contradictory provocations – Walter Kaufmann tries to convince Nietzsche's audience that *The Birth of Tragedy* ought to end with the history of the first fifteen sections and excuse if not ignore the application of this history to modernity in the remaining ten sections, as if embarrassed by the use of history), with a glance over my shoulder to keep in mind how history views and reviews Nietzsche, I'd like to undergo a preliminary teasing out of some textual threads that show how Nietzsche plays with history and historiography.

Nietzsche of course warns, in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" of the dangers of an excess of history or an excessive relationship to the historical, protesting "*the historical education of modern man*" and demanding in that essay that "man should above all learn to live and should employ history only in *the service of the life he has learned to live*".⁵ Concerned as that essay is with his contemporary German culture and pedagogy, we can nonetheless understand and relate to history as an oppressive presence that stifles creativity and innovation in the name of tradition. The Book has been written and must be obeyed. And the academic discipline of history that perceives itself as a social science, rejecting partisanship and

⁴ BW, 99.

⁵ UM, 116.

utility under the fictive presumption of preserving objective truths. Since Hayden White's *Metahistory* (which includes a chapter on Nietzsche), there has been, somewhat reassuringly, a "linguistic turn" among some historians daring radical historiography, but such ludic endeavors have yet to infiltrate our Common Core, despite the shift from teaching history to social studies or from Great Men to socioeconomic movements. Perhaps still under the spell of the Alexandrine, the urgent need to (re-)learn to live remains. We still have yet to construct a more ideal curriculum for the contemporary kindergarten that promotes an affirmative worldview that is faithful to the Earth.

But Nietzsche doesn't promote amnesia as the antidote for the modern condition. In "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life" he identifies three historiographical methodologies, the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical. Monumental history inspires and provokes, inspiring with the possibility of greatness even if it threatens to humble the weak with a saturated sense of reverence, lapsing into the antiquarian. "Only he who is oppressed by a present need, and who wants to throw off this burden at any cost, has need of critical history, that is to say a history that judges and condemns."⁶ For all the talk of promoting critical thinking in today's pedagogical debates, such a partisan approach to former times is often discouraged as an ethnocentric trap, the cool objectivity that dismisses narrative history as written by the victorious as the expense of the vanquished isn't critical in the sense Nietzsche promotes here. And we would do well to heed his caution when he adds that these methodologies are plants that require a certain soil. "Much mischief is caused through the thoughtless transplantation of these plants," he warns, "the critic without need, the antiquary without piety, the man who recognizes greatness but cannot himself do great things, are such plants, estranged from their mother soil and

⁶ UM, 72.

degenerated into weeds.”⁷ Can we avoid being guilty of mischief, if we lack need, piety and greatness in our attempt to think through this call to consider Nietzsche in history?

Nietzsche’s thought (if not doctrine) of Eternal Recurrence is hinted at in this 1873 essay, when he considers an “absolute veracity” with monumental history:

That which was once possible could present itself as a possibility for a second time only if the Pythagoreans were right in believing that when the constellation of the heavenly bodies is repeated the same things, down to the smallest event, must also be repeated on earth: so that whenever the stars stand in a certain relation to one another a Stoic again joins with an Epicurean to murder Caesar, and when they stand in another relation Columbus will again discover America. Only if, when the fifth act of the earth’s drama ended, the whole play every time began again from the beginning, if it was certain that the same complex of motives, the same *deus ex machina*, the same catastrophe were repeated at definite intervals, could the man of power venture to desire monumental history in full icon-like *veracity*, that is to say with every individual peculiarity depicted in precise detail: but that will no doubt happen only when the astronomers have again become astrologers.

Without such veracity, the monumental exhibits effects at the expense of causes, Nietzsche argues.

⁷ Ibid.

What have we seen this past week in Leicester as England reburied Richard III? Historical revisionists have used the occasion to disparage Shakespeare's mythmaking as Tudorophilia, reconstituting the figure of the last English monarch to die in battle as not-such-a-bad-guy-after-all. The effect, Richard III's corpse, has been divorced in British discourse from the cause, the axe of Wyllyam Gardynyr that puts an end to Richard's reign. The commoner would marry Helen Tudor, the illegitimate grand-daughter of Owen Tudor and Catherine de Valois. If Wyllyam did not swing his axe at the head of Richard, trapped on his horse at Bosworth, he would never have married Helen Tudor, the illegitimate daughter of Jasper Tudor, himself a product of the secret marriage between Owen Tudor and the Queen Consort of England, Catherine de Valois. Wyllyam Gardynyr's son Richard married Lady Margaret Anne de Grey, the grand-daughter of Owen and Catherine's daughter Tacina. Wyllyam Gardynyr, the cause of Richard III's death was omitted from the discourse surrounding the reburial with full royal ceremony this week, but I've been acutely aware of what my 15th-great-grandfather⁸ did on 22 August 1485 at Bosworth, as it is one of millions and millions of permutations in time that bring me here now. This is some of what I've seen this past week as I look to Leicester with monumental but personal veracity.

If I am to know myself, what made me? What does this history mean for my life now? England is trying to put an awful lot to rest with Richard III's bones but I refuse this reconciliation through ceremonial commemoration and rather remain partisan, claiming a part.

Nietzsche indulges in genealogy not only at the cultural level in his history of morality but also on the personal level (with a hint of calendric astrology) in *Ecce Homo*.⁹ Considering

⁸ Perhaps, if ancestry.com is to be believed.

⁹ BW, 681-682.

his ancestry, he confesses “it is not difficult for me to be a ‘good European’.”¹⁰ Even if, or especially if, I find myself at war with myself in historic conflicts, I am this conflict, made up of all the chances, inextricably linked with each and every decision made in time. To reject any or wish they had not been made for whatever reason is to will my own negation.

This is what Nietzsche relates more powerfully in the form of a fable or a riddle nine years later than his *Untimely Meditations* in *The Gay Science*. After his madman proclaims the death of God, in section 341 Nietzsche proposes a spirit who warns you:

This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you – all in the same succession and sequence.

Would you curse such a spirit that bears such news as a demon or praise it as a god? Would you reject or affirm such a metaphysics (the last, as Heidegger says)? How can you enjoy anything if such pleasure is predicated on the horrors of Flight 9525, 9/11, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, Waterloo, Bosworth, Jesus’ Crucifixion, Thermopylae and Troy?

“Existence can only be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon” Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy*,¹¹ and this historical aesthetics mandates the greatest stress as the ultimate ethics: live now and build such a future as to look on this play through time with delight, not despair.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche proclaims such an aestheticized historicism is:

¹⁰ Ibid, 681.

¹¹ BW, 60.

the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have what was and is repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably da capo – not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle.¹²

How can we affirm the reprehensible? How can we justify existence without such an aesthetics?

Kant attempts a similar justification with his “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” employing a similar language of aesthetics, albeit with radically dissimilar foundations and ends.

We can scarcely help feeling a certain distaste on observing [human] activities as enacted in the great world-drama, for we find that, despite the apparent wisdom of individual actions here and there, everything as a whole is made up of folly and childish vanity, and often of childish malice and destructiveness. The result is that we do not know what sort of opinion we should form of our species, which is so proud of its supposed superiority.

Kant’s way out of this empirical crisis is to posit “*a universal history of the world in accordance with a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind,*” finding hope and redeeming not

¹² BW, 258.

only folly and misfortune but catastrophe as bumps along the road in nature's predestined path for humanity.¹³

Nietzsche of course eschews such teleology much less eschatology, and he better embodies the spirit of Diogenes the Cynic with his homeless identification as a citizen of the world, κοσμοπολίτης. Whereas Kant preaches the civil servant's sense of responsibility, or where Hegel posits a mythology of the historical,¹⁴ Nietzsche warns, through the voice of Zarathustra, of the "New Idol," the State. We would do well to heed the warning he offers with these words in the section where he identifies this New Idol: "Behold the superfluous! They steal the works of the inventors and the treasures of the sages for themselves; 'education' they call their theft – and everything turns to sickness and misfortune for them"¹⁵

The greatest stress, the weight of history, is a critical concern for education, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra proclaims in the chapter "On the Land of Education" when he proclaims "I am driven out of fatherlands and mother lands. Thus I now love only my children's land, yet undiscovered."¹⁶ Looking towards the future requires justification of the ancestral, the historical, for "In my children I want to make up for being the child of my fathers – and to all the future, for this today."¹⁷

When Nietzsche considers himself a "good European" as a consequence of his ancestry in *Ecce Homo*, he rejects the nationalisms propped up on the post-monarchical republics of the 19th century in the spirit of a romanticized folkloric past. Well before *Ecce Homo* (written in 1888), in *Human, All-Too-Human* (1878), Nietzsche prophetically announces the eventual

¹³ Kant, 25.

¹⁴ PN, 40.

¹⁵ PN, 162.

¹⁶ PN, 233.

¹⁷ Ibid.

abolition of nations through intermarriage and argues “one should declare oneself without embarrassment as a *good European* and work actively for the amalgamation of nations.”¹⁸ Such work doesn’t simply involve the practical pleasures of procreation, though such Dionysian desires and sensations should not be repressed or denied, but also involves an active cosmopolitics, as Balibar and Douzani propose.

As we consider the role of history in education today, we must be sensitive to the indifference of colonization and imperialism but must not be trapped in time as if we are at the end of history without moving towards the cosmopolitan kindergarten Nietzsche imagines as a future that affirms history without prejudice and learns to say YES to life.

What then are we to make of Nietzsche in history, this voice that claims to be all names in history? Burkhardt, to whom he wrote the remark, had said seven-years prior, “fundamentally of course you are always teaching history.”¹⁹ Perhaps those words echoed in Nietzsche’s letter from Torino. They echo to this day, as we recognize Nietzsche in history and history in Nietzsche. That is fundamentally what Nietzsche is doing with his texts and what we are doing when we engage them, moving towards our children’s land as we embrace all names in history. By doing so, we realize history now and for our children’s future, that they may dare to play someday in a cosmopolitan kindergarten that says of this great world-historical drama, “encore, encore”!

¹⁸ PN, 61-62

¹⁹ qtd. Hayden White, *Metahistory*, 331.

Works Cited

Balibar, Étienne. "Cosmopolitanism and Secularism: Controversial Legacies and Prospective Interrogations." *Grey Room* 44 (Summer 2011). 6-25.

Douzanis, Costas. "The Metaphysics of Cosmopolitanism." *After Cosmopolitanism*. Ed. Rosi Braidotti, Patrick Hanafin and Bolette Blaagaard. New York: Routledge, 2013. 57-76.

Kant, Immanuel. "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose." *The Cosmopolitan*

Reader. Ed. Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held. Malden, MA: Polity, 2010. 17-26.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York:

The Modern Library, 1968.

---. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1974.

---. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 1968.

---. *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*. Ed. and trans. Christopher Middleton. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996.

---. *Untimely Meditations*. Ed. Daniel Breazeale. Trans. R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Silverstein, Jason. "He was passionate about the Alps, even obsessed": Andreas Lubitz

Colleagues Said He Was Familiar with Site of Carnage." *New York Daily News*. 28 March 2015. <<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/andreas-lubitz-obsessed-alps-friend-article-1.2165370>>

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*.

Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, UP, 1975.